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AUTHOR Flora, Pat T.
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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to encourage South Carolina secondary vocational education administrators, teachers, and counselors to implement programs designed to keep potential dropouts in school and recover those who leave school prematurely, as well as to provide those educators with research findings relevant to such activities. Following an introduction that describes the magnitude of the nation's and South Carolina's dropout problem, chapter 2 states a philosophical base for vocational education's role in dropout prevention and recovery. Chapter 3 describes characteristics of at-risk youth, and chapter 4 discusses the key components of vocational education that enhance its ability to address the needs of at-risk youth. Chapter 5 lists key elements of successful programs. Chapter 6 lists nonvocational educational resources. Chapter 7 discusses community resources for dropout prevention and recovery activities. The eighth chapter describes the South Carolina Office of Vocational Education Dropout Prevention Pilot Program, including its activities in Cherokee County, Fairfield County, and Florence. Chapter 9 discusses alternative scheduling as a method for making dropout recovery easier. Chapter 10 discusses staff development as a necessary ingredient in successful programs. Following a short conclusion, three appendices contain guidelines for observing behavior and identifying characteristics; teacher, student, and parent questionnaires; an in-school referral form; guidelines for matching teaching style to students' learning style; and questionnaires and worksheets on which to identify parents and others in the community who can act as resources or provide resources. A 34-item bibliography concludes the document. (CML)

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A Guide for Secondary Vocational Administrators, Teachers, and Counselors

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION'S ROLE IN DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

A GUIDE FOR SECONDARY VOCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS

Dr. Charlie G. Williams, State Superintendent of Education

Sidney B. Cooper, Deputy Superintendent
Division of Instruction

Dr. Moody Oswald, Director
Office of Vocational Education

Developed By:

Pat T. Flora, Consultant
Special Programs
Office of Vocational Education

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South Carolina Department of Education: An Equal Opportunity Agency
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

PREFACE

This guide is written with the intent to provide a starting place for local vocational administrators, teachers and counselors who are seeking to implement programs and activities designed to keep potential dropouts in school and to recover those who leave school prematurely. Its purpose is to create an awareness of the issues and to bring forth relevant research findings in the context of secondary vocational education programs. The goal is to provide both the incentive and the practical recommendations required to initiate action at the local school district level.

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- Ms. Shirley Snipes, Vocational Guidance Counselor
  Aiken County Career Center
- Ms. June Todd, Coordinator, Project Excel
  Richland School District One
- Mr. Wayne Cole, Consultant
  At-Risk Youth Program Coordination Section
  South Carolina Department of Education
- Mr. Wayman Stover, Coordinator of High Schools
  Office of Vocational Education
  South Carolina Department of Education

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been written in the last decade about the state of education in America. With the publication of A Nation At Risk, the 1983 Report of the U. S. Commission on Excellence in Education, school administrators, teachers, state and local government officials, and the private sector were mobilized into a posture of educational improvement and a vigorous commitment to academic excellence. School reforms were rapidly implemented across the nation and in South Carolina through legislative action such as the Education Improvement Act of 1984. Increased funding was generated and quickly targeted to improve student performance by raising academic and attendance standards, strengthening the teaching and testing of the basic skills, and generally enhancing the quality of personnel, facilities, and management of the educational system as a whole. The positive impact of the school reform movement can be identified across states through improved performance on national tests and other measures. The assessment data for 1987-88 discussed in the December 1988 South Carolina Department of Education publication What is the Penny Buying for South Carolina? highlights several measures of educational improvement such as continued gains on the BSAP and CTBS tests, increased college enrollment figures, high student attendance rates and gains on the SAT. South Carolina led the nation in SAT score gains with an increase of 35 points since 1984. We have much to be proud of for our efforts.

Even with the improvement accomplished to date, one critical finding of this recent assessment demands our attention. The dropout rate of high school students has shown little or no improvement and approximately one out of every four drops out prior to graduation. When the number of 1987 South Carolina high school graduates is compared to the 1st grade enrollment level for that age group, the survival rate for graduates is 67.9%. Although other factors such as non-promotions, school transfers, and family migration enter into this particular comparison, the actual dropout rate for South Carolina is estimated at 30%. Different data comparisons may yield varying results, but the underlying measure is far too many young people in South Carolina and the nation fail to acquire the minimum credential required for productive employment--the high school diploma. While the state and national rates of high school dropouts have not increased substantially over the last 25 years, the consequences in human, social and economic terms have increased dramatically.

The 1988 report America's Shame, America's Hope: Twelve Million Youth At Risk, by MDC, Inc., looks at the growing number of students who may be educationally at risk, and highlights the economic impact of undereducating a considerable proportion of our youth. Every year nearly one million students drop out of school which, as the title suggests, equates to 12 million more dropouts by the year 2000. While many varied and interacting factors can contribute to a youth quitting school, one common characteristic among dropouts is low scores on tests of basic skills. Consider that by 1990, 75 percent of this country's jobs will require some form of training beyond high school. By 2000, the projected median level of education required for new jobs will be 13.5 years. The private sector employment demand is expected to almost double from 1978 to 1990, up to 156.6 million, and the fastest growing jobs will require higher skill levels of math, language, and reasoning. To compound the situation, the number of people 16 to 24 years of age is declining. In 1978, this group represented 23 percent of the total population; but by 1995, it will only amount to 16 percent--a decline of about four million. The prospect of fewer youth, more high-skill jobs, and a substantial number of high school dropouts unable to compete in the growing job market would seem to predict a serious labor shortage and a growing underclass of the disillusioned poor in the near future.

The failure to prepare young people for productive employment is costly for the individual and for the nation as a whole. Because of the changing job market, high school dropouts can no longer expect to find good paying jobs in agriculture, textiles, and manufacturing as they did in the past. The MDC, Inc., 1988 report states that the real, mean earnings of male dropouts between the ages of 20 to 24 declined 41.6 percent (from $11,210 to $6,552) between 1973 and 1984. Also, consider the estimate that the 973,000 youth who dropped out of high school in 1981 will lose $228 billion in personal earnings over a lifetime, and, as a result, the nation will lose $68.4 billion in taxes. To give another perspective to the cost factor, the report cites the findings of the Committee for Economic Development which indicates that "every $1 spent on early prevention and intervention can save $4.74 in costs of remedial education, welfare, and crime further down the road." The statistics are staggering; the message is clear.

It is time to move beyond intellectual discussions of the nature and extent of the dropout problem in America. It is time for school administrators, teachers, state and local government officials, and the private sector to rally together and implement a course of action to bring needed change, much as we did in the early 1980's for the purpose of educational reform. The move to excellence will never be complete until equity is achieved and all youth are provided the support required to earn a high school diploma. Every component of the educational system must be reviewed and readied to contribute to the goal of dropout prevention and recovery. Vocational educators should take a lead role in this effort.

PHILOSOPHICAL BASE
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION'S ROLE IN DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

- Vocational Education is a positive force that can help prevent students from leaving school prior to obtaining a high school diploma. There are many practical, student-centered influences that are inherent in the delivery system. These components should be fully developed and utilized as vocational educators join the search for strategies to prevent and recover high school dropouts.

- Vocational Education is not the only vehicle for dropout prevention and recovery, and should not be considered a panacea for all youth whose school-related or family-related characteristics combine to impede their progress in school. Vocational educators must look both within our present system and outward to other education and community resources in our efforts to motivate and enable at-risk youth to succeed.

- Vocational educators at all levels: administrators, teachers, and counselors, must become aware of the nature and extent of the dropout problem in our schools today. Staff development activities must be provided to reinforce the vital responsibility every educator has to identify potential dropouts and to implement proactive strategies to encourage these youth to complete school. Alternative strategies must also be considered for those youth who will leave school without the occupational and related academic competencies required for meaningful employment. Vocational educators are in a unique position to lead the way in dropout prevention and recovery. We must accept the challenge.

IDENTIFICATION OF AT-RISK YOUTH

The decision to implement a dropout prevention and recovery program requires the ability to identify those youth who are at risk of dropping out and to design a program to meet their needs. There is no simple way to predict who will drop out of school because there are many contributing factors which often interact. The reasons youth decide to quit school are as varied as the individuals themselves. What approach can vocational educators use to accomplish this important task?

There is a considerable body of information on the subject of why students drop out of school. Much of the research focuses on characteristics which are common among dropouts, while other studies report the reasons dropouts give for quitting school. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education includes the following synthesis of the literature regarding identifying characteristics in the report Strengthening Vocational Education's Role in Decreasing the Dropout Rate (Weber, 1987):

- **Cognitive characteristics**--demonstrate poor basic skills (e.g., reading and computation skills) as shown in test scores well below average for their expected grade levels; repeated grade levels; poor academic performance; and low scores on intelligence tests (mean IQ of 90)

- **Affective characteristics**--appear to lack interest in school and school work; feel alienated from the school environment, teachers, and peers; perceive little interest, respect, or acceptance on the part of teachers; have low self-concepts and exhibit characteristics of social immaturity; tend to be either hostile and unruly or passive and apathetic

- **Other characteristics**--are older than their classmates; are frequently absent and tardy; are from low-socioeconomic backgrounds in which one or both parents did not complete high school; are from weak or broken homes; are often members of minority groups and/or handicapped; receive little family encouragement and psychological support to stay in school; have had at least one child and/or are married.

Many high school students can be characterized by at least one of the above attributes. Every vocational education teacher has had a student in the classroom who exhibited poor academic skills or was socially immature or came from a single-parent home. It is important to note that not every student who has these characteristics will drop out; although, those that do generally reflect some combination of these features.

One strategy which may be helpful in devising plans to identify potential dropouts is to examine responses from actual dropouts as to why they quit school. The National Center for Education Statistics Bulletin "High School Dropouts: Descriptive Information from High School and Beyond" (Peng and Takai, 1983) provides some insight on this perspective. From a 1980 national representative sample of 1,015 schools, 50 percent of the base-year survey youth who had left the schools they attended as sophomores in 1980 were re-contacted in 1982. Eighty-eight percent of the youth identified as dropouts responded to a questionnaire inquiring why they dropped out, what were their plans, and what types of activities were they involved in since leaving school.

The general data obtained from this survey supports previous research findings that low-socioeconomic background, poor academic performance and enrollment in non-academic programs are related to higher dropout rates. The fact that vocational-technical and general

program students had a higher dropout rate than academic program students (15 and 13 percent vs. 4 percent) poses an interesting dilemma for vocational educators and emphasizes the need to review programs and practices from the perspective of at-risk youth. Several recent articles and reports clearly indicate that certain types of vocational program experiences actually provide incentives for at-risk youth to stay in school. These positive influences of vocational education will be explored later in this document.

Peng and Takai point out that the reasons given by the survey respondents as to why they dropped out may be tempered by the natural tendency for people to rationalize behavior which others might regard as failure. The data is important, however, because it enables us to better understand some of the factors which may prompt students to drop out. A summary of the reasons given, grouped by sex and other categories such as "school-related" and "family-related", provides the following information, as quoted from the study:

> For male dropouts, the most frequently cited reason was, "I had poor grades; I was not doing well in school" (36 percent), which was followed by "school was not for me; I did not like school" (35 percent), and "I was offered a job and I chose to work" (27 percent). "I couldn't get along with teachers" was the reason given by 21 percent of the male dropouts, and "I was expelled or suspended" by 13 percent. About 14 percent indicated that they dropped out because they had to help support their families.
>
> For females, the first four most frequently cited reasons were, "I got married or planned to get married" (31 percent); "school was not for me" (31 percent); "had poor grades" (30 percent); and "pregnancy" (23 percent). Being "offered a job" was cited by 11 percent of the female dropouts, and "couldn't get along with teachers" by 10 percent. (Peng and Takai, 1983)

It should be noted that respondents could report more than one reason, as applicable.

This summary reflects earlier findings which highlight the differences between males and females in the major reasons cited for leaving school. One common response for both males and females, though, was "school was not for me" (35 percent and 31 percent, respectively). This reason, along with a sizeable percentage of dropouts also citing "poor grades", is an indication that schools are not fully responsive to the educational needs and learning styles of many students. In fact, certain school policies actually contribute to the likelihood that students will drop out. The October/November 1987 issue of the "Missouri LINCletter" reports Joanna Robinson's finding that the strongest predictor of dropping out is repetition of a grade in school. Citing Joan Solomon's remarks at a 1987 literacy convention, the author states that "the likelihood of a student dropping out increases by 40 or 50 percent if retained in one grade and increases by 90 percent for those retained in two grades of school". Along with creating an awareness of the characteristics of potential dropouts, we must also become aware of the "characteristics" or policies of the educational system which have an adverse effect on at-risk youth.

It is evident from the literature on this subject that early prevention and intervention prior to the high school years are the most effective ways to ensure students' success in school. As vocational educators, there are intervention strategies we can adopt to help potential dropouts, and we may be these students' last chance for success. Identification of students who need supplemental assistance is the first step in intervention and requires the combined efforts of vocational administrators, counselors and teachers. Vocational administrators need to provide the leadership and management necessary to establish dropout prevention and recovery as a school-wide priority and to focus program efforts on the needs of that particular school's students and staff. Vocational counselors need to use all of the data at their disposal to identify at-risk youth and to assess the specific areas of need which demand attention.

Vocational teachers need to get to know their students better and learn how to identify students who need additional support to remain in school.

In order for the identification of at-risk youth to become a real priority for vocational educators, local vocational administrators must examine existing school policies which are related to dropouts and establish new policies which reinforce the commitment to enable all students to graduate. This may involve the redistribution of resources and staff time, as well as an "attitude adjustment" effort. Instructional and administrative leadership will be required to reinforce the philosophy that every student **can** succeed and must be given the opportunity to do so. Inservice training must be provided to encourage and enable staff to assume their designated roles in the effort. Management strategies must be developed to prevent the identification process from becoming over-burdensome. The vocational administrator must also play a key role in determining that the identification methods and intervention strategies selected for implementation are appropriate for a particular school's staff and student population.

By the time students begin to enter vocational education programs, they have a recorded history of basic skills achievement, academic performance, attendance, disciplinary action, health information and other pertinent data which can provide clues as to whether or not a student is at risk. Vocational guidance counselors need to become familiar with the characteristics and reasons commonly associated with actual dropouts and use this knowledge to look for evidence of problem areas in students' school records prior to a crisis situation. Poor academic achievement, unruly behavior or excessive absences may actually be symptoms of some underlying health or family problem, and consideration needs to be given to these possibilities. Some of the "affective" and "other" characteristics compiled by Weber are not so readily apparent. In order to determine whether a student feels alienated, has a poor self-concept, or lacks parental encouragement, additional input may be required.

Weber and Silvani-Lacey (1983) point out that it is important to be as unobtrusive as possible when identifying potential dropouts in order to avoid the stigma that labels place on students who may already feel isolated and separated from the mainstream. Sources of additional input on student characteristics include teachers, parents and the students themselves. Information may be obtained from observation, surveys, questionnaires or referral forms. Examples of forms which suggest ways of soliciting information not readily available are included in Appendix A. The ability to compile and understand information relevant to how students perceive themselves in relation to the school environment will enable guidance counselors to better identify and provide at-risk youth with appropriate counseling activities or referrals to other services as needed.

The vocational teacher may be in the best position to identify students enrolled in vocational programs who require intervention to remain in school. The daily scheduled contact, the nature of the competency-based vocational instruction, an awareness and understanding of risk factors, and a genuine desire for each student to achieve his or her vocational potential provide an excellent opportunity to identify at-risk youth. Teachers will benefit from inservice training to raise their awareness of the dropout problem and to gain their commitment to help every vocational student earn a high school diploma. With the proper training, administrative leadership, and coordination, the vocational teacher who sincerely cares can be the first adult in the school system to reach out to a troubled youth. Some of the "cognitive" characteristics summarized in Weber's research may be easily detected by vocational teachers who need to be aware that students' failure to achieve minimum program competencies is a signal that instructional intervention is required. One important factor related to potential dropouts that teachers need to recognize and respond to is that individuals have variations in learning style, and a single method of instruction may not be effective for every student in the class. An example of how student characteristics relate to learning styles and teaching strategies is included in Appendix B. Vocational teachers who

learn to identify potential dropouts are in a unique position to provide direct intervention strategies or make a timely referral for necessary services.

To be effective, vocational administrators, counselors and teachers must work together to identify youth at risk of dropping out of school. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth, a training manual developed by staff of the At-Risk Youth Project of North Texas State University, recommends a formal system of identification so that input gathered from different sources can be compiled and understood more readily. Inservice training is recommended to enable staff roles in the identification process to be clearly defined and coordinated. The goal is to develop a comprehensive biographical file on the at-risk students, drawing information from as many sources as possible in order to obtain an accurate assessment of students' needs. The information compiled through such a process will enable vocational educators to develop and implement appropriate strategies and programs for their particular student population.

THE KEY COMPONENTS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: RESOURCES TO BUILD ON

Before vocational educators attempt to develop or replicate successful strategies for dropout prevention and recovery, we would do well to look at our present system of programs and activities and highlight some of the ways vocational education can be viewed as a powerful component of the overall dropout prevention and recovery effort. The South Carolina vocational education delivery system is not designed to be a panacea for all youth whose circumstances or characteristics make them at risk of dropping out of school, nor should it be. However, many of the elements of this system directly target a number of the factors which can contribute to a student's decision to quit before attaining a high school diploma. Given the facts that (1) many youth currently enrolled in vocational programs are potentially at risk, (2) there are other at-risk youth for whom vocational education is the most appropriate education program, and (3) funding to implement new programs for dropout prevention and recovery is extremely limited, the present vocational education delivery system must be fully utilized to assist youth in completing their secondary education.

The strengths of vocational education which enhance the ability to address the needs of at-risk youth lie in two major aspects of the system. The first is that one of the primary objectives of vocational education is to develop occupational and related academic competencies for meaningful employment. The key factors included in this objective are (1) occupational skill training, (2) a competency-based curriculum, (3) the reinforcement of basic skills, (4) vocational student organizations, (5) career development activities, and (6) cooperative education opportunities. The second major aspect is the intent, as mandated by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, to make vocational education programs accessible to all students. The Federal funds provide specific set-asides for students who are handicapped or academically or economically disadvantaged. Nearly one-third of the basic State grant portion of the Federal allocation is targeted for these at-risk students in vocational education programs. Funds are also available under the basic State grant portion to support model programs for young women aged 14 through 25. Under Title III-A of the Perkins Act, funds are provided to link education agencies and community-based organizations together to provide vocational education support programs for severely economically and educationally disadvantaged youth.

The following summary is intended to bring selected aspects of the present delivery system into focus to illustrate the impact vocational educators can have on dropout prevention and recovery. Not every positive aspect of vocational education will be included in this discussion. For the purpose of clarity, the identified elements have been categorized as "Regular" or "Special" program components although, in practice, there is some overlap.

Regular Program Components

1. **Occupational Skill Training:** Vocational occupational programs provide students with hands-on experiences in the classroom which relate directly to jobs. Students are better able to identify what they are learning with future job opportunities. James Weber points out several characteristics of vocational classrooms that correspond to characteristics of model dropout prevention programs in his article "The Relevance of Vocational Education to Dropout Prevention" in the September 1988 issue of the Vocational Education Journal. Vocational classes have lower student/teacher ratios which promote more individualized attention. Students are often more actively involved in class activities than they are in non-vocational classrooms. Also, vocational programs offer more opportunities for performance to be recognized.

As Weber and other researchers discuss, more individualized attention can provide opportunities to strengthen the student-teacher relationship so often lacking for the at-risk student. Vocational teachers should take advantage of this and use increased contact time to motivate and encourage students who have negative attitudes toward school. The practical application strategy of vocational occupational instruction is often more effective for students with poor basic and academic skills than the lecture, discussion and writing approach found in many non-vocational classrooms. When students are given opportunities to work cooperatively on class assignments and projects, there is an improved chance for positive peer interaction and recognition of performance. These activities can serve to increase the self-concept of students who feel alienated or discouraged. Finally, it is important to note that dropouts from high school who have participated in some vocational courses are more likely to have been involved in "exploratory" courses rather than the "occupational" courses which provide specific job training and the other kinds of benefits listed above (Weber, 1987).

2. Competency-Based Curriculum: All vocational occupational programs in South Carolina now have identified minimum program competencies which reflect basic entry-level skills and knowledge essential for successful employment. This helps to assure students that there is a direct link between completing a course of study and obtaining a job. The relevance of this linkage needs to be emphasized to provide motivation for at-risk students who often receive little encouragement to stay in school and who may believe the learning difficulties they have encountered to date are simply not worth additional effort.

The instructional method is also competency-based and certain features of this process can help at-risk youth to remain in school. The guide Implementing Competency-Based Vocational Education in South Carolina highlights and defines the major characteristics of a competency-based vocational education program. Student performance objectives are specified in advance of instruction and this enables the student to see what he or she will be able to do when the instruction is successfully completed. Weber and Silvani-Lacey's research (1983) led them to conclude that because potential dropouts are frequently plagued by insecurity and self-doubts resulting from weak or absent structure in their lives, learning "goals and objectives that are explicitly and clearly stated are practical and can foster positive results by providing the structure that these students need".

Another important feature of competency-based instruction is that student achievement is based upon demonstrated competence. As students progress through the required competencies, there is feedback, reinforcement, and many opportunities to experience success. Since mastery of performance objectives is criterion-referenced, or measured by specific standards, there is less comparison to other students as part of the evaluation process. This positive method of instruction and learning is especially important for students with a history of poor academic performance and failure.

Competency-based instruction is individualized and flexible in that it promotes the use of a variety of instructional methods and learning materials. As previously mentioned, the ability to match teaching style to learning style is vital to ensure that students do not turn off from an instructional approach that is not successful for them. Competency-based instruction encourages both the student and the teacher to be more accountable for the mastery of competencies because both must accept the responsibility for meeting identified

standards. This combination of features helps to create a positive partnership for learning.

3. **Reinforcement of Basic Skills:** A major curriculum thrust in the last several years has been the integration of basic skills instruction within the vocational classroom. While basic skills have always been a component of the vocational content area, the various educational reform movements have placed a greater emphasis on student deficiencies. Poor basic skills and poor academic performance are two of the key cognitive characteristics of dropouts, and vocational educators must be persistent in the effort to improve the basic skills of all vocational students. Given the skill requirements projected for the job market of the near future, competency in the basic skills will be a minimum requirement for successful job performance.

   Several curriculum products and instructional strategies have been implemented in South Carolina to assist vocational educators in the reinforcement of basic skills. These include basic skills word lists and lesson plans for each vocational program area, Teaching Reading in Vocational Education, and the guide Reinforcing Basic Skills Through Vocational Education, among others. Vocational educators can play a key role, particularly where at-risk students are concerned, because in the context of a vocational program, students can more readily recognize the importance of basic skills. Students who exhibit little or no interest in their academic courses may be able to see how language, mathematics, science and communication skills are necessary in order to function as productive employees in real life work situations. This can be a motivating factor for improved academic achievement.

4. **Vocational Student Organizations:** A unique component of each vocational occupational program is the vocational student organization which offers benefits to students in the areas of leadership, citizenship, vocational and personal development. These student organizations provide opportunities for youth to experience activities outside of the classroom, as well as enhancing the vocational instruction. Within these organizations students can become student leaders or develop the ability to follow the leadership of others, both of which are important adult roles. Participation in community service projects, working as a member of a group, and the opportunity to make decisions lead to skills in citizenship. Student organization activities provide experiences which improve knowledge, increase skills, and foster appropriate attitudes which help students advance toward their occupational goals. For at-risk youth who may feel alienated from their peers, participation in a vocational student organization can help to develop a positive self-concept through group interaction and fellowship. Incentive awards and competitive events provide opportunities for recognition. Adult professionals who are associated with these organizations can serve as role models who provide encouragement and incentive to youth who do not receive this type of positive influence at home.

5. **Career Development:** As part of an overall guidance and counseling program, career development activities provide the information and reinforcement needed to keep students moving in the direction of an occupational goal via a high school diploma. The research on at-risk youth points to the need for early intervention, and vocational guidance counselors know the benefits of providing a variety of exploratory and assessment activities at the lower grade levels. All students need to be aware of the career options available to them and to understand their personal goals and objectives. Career and Technology Awareness is a curriculum guide designed for students in kindergarten through

6th grade and a new guide, Exploring Career Options, is under development for use in junior high and middle schools. Youth from low-socioeconomic backgrounds in which one or both parents did not complete high school are particularly vulnerable in that their experiences outside of school do little to prepare them for career planning. Vocational teachers and counselors need to collaborate to provide assessment activities which enable students to make informed decisions based on their particular interests and abilities. This phase of career development helps to ensure success based on the appropriate placement of students into vocational programs.

Vocational teachers and counselors can assist at-risk youth enrolled in vocational programs by helping them to focus on the reality that the vocational instruction process is preparation for a job or further education which can lead to a salary that will provide them with a desired lifestyle. Motivational strategies which are exciting and challenging should be incorporated throughout the program to help students see the long-range benefits and stay turned-on to learning. Employability skills development is a key component of vocational education programs because, in addition to occupational skills, many students lack the information and techniques required to obtain and keep a job. Job Seeking Skills and Job Keeping Skills are two curriculum guides designed for use with high school students. Vocational educators recognize that career development is a life-long process and efforts to implement comprehensive career development programs for students in kindergarten through 12th grade are currently underway.

6. **Cooperative Education:** The cooperative method of instruction enables vocational students to receive required academic and vocational instruction by alternation of study in school and on a job. These experiences must be planned and agreed to by the school, the student, the parents and the employer to ensure that each makes an appropriate contribution to the student's education and employability. One key advantage of this instructional approach for potential dropouts who fail to see the relevance of school is that it serves to clearly link classroom learning with the world of work. In A Guide for Dropout Prevention: Creating an Integrated Learning Environment in Secondary Schools, developed by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, the effectiveness of work experience programs in preventing dropouts is tied to the following conditions:

- the work experiences are tied to the instructional objectives of the classroom;
- the work experiences have operational linkages to the students' overall school plans and career goals;
- the content of classroom activities is related to the work experiences;
- the work experiences are challenging and meaningful to the student, so that they are truly educational experiences; and
- the teacher discusses the meaning of the work experiences with students, helping students to articulate the knowledge that they have acquired from the experiences. (Fennimore and Pritz, 1988)

Each of these conditions is met by cooperative vocational education programs. A clear distinction is made by the cited report and others between work experience such as cooperative education, where the on-the-job experience is "logically and operationally tied to a student's overall education program" (Weber, 1987), and work-study programs which often fail to effectively link the work experience to the student's overall school program.

Special Program Components

1. **Title II-A Set-Aside Funds for Handicapped:** All school districts are entitled by formula allocation to receive Federal set-aside funds to assist handicapped individuals enrolled in vocational education programs. Being handicapped is one of the "other" characteristics Weber (1987) found to be associated with dropouts, and vocational educators use these funds in a variety of ways to provide supplemental services and activities necessary for handicapped individuals to succeed in vocational education. Examples of how these funds can be used include supporting a teacher aide within the vocational classroom to provide one-on-one instructional assistance to handicapped individuals, purchasing additional equipment or instructional materials to meet these students' special needs, or providing supplemental counseling services to assist handicapped students in the transition from school to work. Vocational teachers and counselors can work directly with Special Education personnel in the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) which address specific areas of need on a case-by-case basis.

2. **Title II-A Set-Aside Funds for Disadvantaged:** These funds are also available to school districts on a formula allocation basis. Vocational educators can use these funds to assist economically or academically disadvantaged individuals, which includes dropouts from or potential dropouts from secondary school. The most common service supported by this set-aside is academic remediation; however, school districts are beginning to develop activities which address the "affective" and "other" characteristics associated with dropouts such as excessive absences, unruly behavior, and low self-concept. Use of these monies is an excellent way to provide the supplemental or additional staff, equipment, materials and services that are essential for disadvantaged individuals to succeed in vocational education.

3. **Title II-A Model Programs for Young Women:** Funding for these model programs is available to school districts on a request-for-proposals basis and provides the opportunity for vocational educators to address the employment preparation needs of young women 14 to 25 years of age. The programs, services and activities supported by these funds are designed to enable young women to support themselves and their families. Local projects help targeted participants to gain access to existing quality vocational education programs through the provision of child care, transportation and other services designed to meet their unique needs. Since over 50 percent of teenage mothers drop out of school, this is an excellent resource to develop programs to combat the multiple risk factors facing these individuals.

4. **Title III-A Vocational Education Support Programs by Community-Based Organizations:** The Federal funds available under Title III-A are distributed through a request-for-proposals process and seek to enhance the enrollment of severely economically or educationally disadvantaged youth in vocational education programs. The unique feature of these programs is that they link local education agencies with private non-profit community-based organizations

which have demonstrated effectiveness in serving the needs of youth. The jointly-planned projects can address many of the identified needs of actual and potential dropouts through a variety of activities such as: outreach, transition services, special prevocational programs, assessment, guidance and counseling, and basic skills development. Examples of community-based organizations which have participated in South Carolina are local chambers of commerce, St. Mary Human Development Center, Carolina Youth Development Center, Columbia Urban League, and the Aiken-Barnwell Community Action Agency.

This review of some of the components of the South Carolina secondary vocational education delivery system shows that there are many resources available to vocational educators which address the needs of at-risk youth. As dropout prevention and recovery strategies are contemplated, we should begin by building on the strengths of the system we know best and fully develop and utilize each positive aspect. If we approach the performance of our everyday tasks with a renewed commitment to help every student succeed, we will be better prepared to move forward with new ideas and strategies to achieve this goal.

KEY ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

Many educators and researchers across the country are actively seeking solutions to the dropout problem. It is important to have a full understanding of the consequences we all face if something is not done to alleviate this situation. It is equally important to gain an awareness of the characteristics of at-risk youth so that we can help identify students and channel the best of our available vocational education programs and services in a concerted effort to improve their chances of staying in school. It is also essential to know when additional resources and activities are required and how to go about selecting and implementing new strategies to prevent and recover dropouts.

With all the time, money, and research invested in the dropout problem to date, we might expect to find a reference book which describes the "Top 10" programs recommended for guaranteed success. Unfortunately, there are so many complex and interacting factors which can influence youth to drop out of school that there appear to be no specific solutions that work with all students in all schools in every community. Even those programs which are often mentioned in the literature as "successful" have little in the way of empirical data to support the assumption that they could be replicated with equal success in other schools or states. So, then, how do we proceed?

A good place to begin is with a review of what research of a national scope reveals as key elements or common components of successful programs. The Summer 1988 edition of the "National Dropout Prevention Newsletter", published by the National Dropout Prevention Network and the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University, cites the following as key components of effective dropout prevention programs:

- **Plan comprehensively** for district-wide dropout prevention efforts; include kindergarten through twelfth grade.
- **Assess** the at-risk population in your school.
- **Design** dropout prevention programs that reflect your individual school's needs.
- Incorporate school-wide **systemic change** aimed at increasing success for high-risk youth.
- Encourage **collaboration** between school, community, and business.
- Promote **parent involvement.**
- Establish **communication** linkages between all student services personnel.
- Provide **flexibility** in the curriculum framework to meet the individual needs of students.
- Strive to make your school more **caring, supportive,** and **nurturing** for all students.
- Focus on **staff development** activities to increase sensitivity to issues and to improve strategies for teaching at-risk youth.

- **Evaluate** the objectives of your dropout prevention efforts and programs regularly.

These components cover considerable ground, but they do provide a strong framework for program development which can be tailored for the needs of a particular school setting.

Similar emphases are reflected in the 1987 publication Dealing with Dropouts: The Urban Superintendents' Call to Action from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education. These superintendents agree from experience that there is neither a magic formula nor much conclusive data to document specific programs' success, but they have identified six strategies which are not only geared to at-risk youth but would also serve to improve the quality of education for all students. The booklet provides discussion and illustrations for each of the recommended strategies, and summarizes them as follows:

1. **Intervene early.** Signs that a child is at risk of having academic difficulties can appear even before he or she starts kindergarten. Therefore, educators must monitor the academic and social progress of children carefully and early--and provide special help before years of academic failure have eroded a youngster's self-esteem and left him or her woefully behind in school. Helping children develop competence and confidence in their ability to learn is a good way to instill a desire to learn and to prepare for a lifetime of learning.

2. **Create a positive school climate.** Evidence strongly suggests that this is perhaps the best way educators can encourage students to stay enrolled and to learn. Good schools possess strong leaders who stress academic achievement, maintain an orderly and disciplined environment, and work with staff to instill positive values and self-confidence in students.

3. **Set high expectations.** Research consistently shows that educators who expect students to maintain high standards for attendance, academics, and behavior get more in return. However, expectations must be realistic, and at-risk students must receive the support they need to meet them.

4. **Select and develop strong teachers.** Teachers exert tremendous influence in students' education and attitudes toward school. Therefore, a concerted effort must continually be made to select and train good teachers who are sensitive to the needs of at-risk students.

5. **Provide a broad range of instructional programs** to accommodate students with diverse needs. A pregnant 12-year-old and a habitually truant 16-year-old require different forms of assistance and cannot always be expected to benefit from the same program.

6. **Initiate collaborative efforts** to develop and administer dropout prevention programs. Schools, communities, churches, and families all influence what and how much students learn as well as whether or not they attend school. Hence jointly planned and administered programs are often needed.

These recommendations reinforce the themes of **sensitivity** to the academic and personal needs of at-risk youth; **flexibility** of instruction and services designed to meet identified needs;

and **community** involvement to ensure that all available resources within and outside of schools are employed in the effort to keep students in school.

Along with developing an understanding and appreciation of the program elements which help to ensure success with dropouts and potential dropouts, it is important to know how to approach the planning and implementation stages of the process. From her research on the subject, Barbara Dougherty of the Vocational Studies Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, recommends the following six steps:

1. Assume a leadership role;
2. Face the facts;
3. Form a team;
4. Involve a "mover and a shaker";
5. Seek support; and
6. Develop a plan. (Dougherty, 1986)

One activity which helps to bring focus to this process is to agree on an overall philosophy which addresses such questions as: "Why should students stay in school", "What difference will graduating make" and "What are three things that every student should leave school with". As strategies are considered for program implementation, Dougherty emphasizes the need to create a bond between students and their school by providing key elements such as open, caring staff who convey high expectations and allow students to experience success. She also cautions against selecting short-term projects with short-term success. The more comprehensive the planning and services provided, the more likely the program will have a significant impact on at-risk youth.

An overview of strategic planning for dropout prevention is discussed in the previously cited document A Guide for Dropout Prevention: Creating an Integrated Learning Environment in Secondary Schools (Fennimore and Pritz, 1988). Suggestions include the following, as highlighted from the guide:

1. **Form a dropout prevention task force** of 9 to 12 members which represents a cross-section of the community such as parents, teachers, administrators, business leaders, representatives of social services agencies, school board members, etc. The task force can provide the policy and collaboration required to promote dropout prevention efforts, recommend effective approaches, and identify funding and other resources.

2. **Define the nature and scope of the problem** for the particular school and community through an assessment of characteristics of local students who dropped out, the school-related factors which affect dropouts, and the consequences faced by the dropouts and the community. Task force members should not spend an inordinate amount of time on this phase, but should focus on the aspects most immediately relevant to the school environment and obtain sufficient information to provide direction to the effort.

3. **Set realistic program goals** which go beyond a specific reduction in dropout rates to include goals such as "...decreasing vandalism, improving scores on reading and math achievement tests, improving average daily attendance (ADA), and increasing vocational education enrollments." Setting goals helps

the task force to define the scope of the problem and to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

4. **Generate strategies by brainstorming ideas** that offer possible solutions to the problems at hand. The task force should consult with experts, read relevant materials, contact local and state resources and use their own experiences to attempt to match viable strategies with identified needs. The focus of this effort should be on the school-related factors which appear to increase or decrease the incidence of dropping out, although non-school-related factors should be considered as well.

5. **Select and implement the best strategies** by tailoring the "laundry list" of ideas to accommodate such considerations as the characteristics of the school's at-risk population, the systemic nature of the problem, the available resources, school and community acceptance, flexibility of the present delivery system and staff tolerance for change, and "the perception that there is a problem and the perceived ability to address it."

The authors provide a summary discussion of each of the considerations listed in Item 5, above, as well as suggesting "structural" options such as the "adopt-a-student" approach, the team approach, the school-within-a-school approach, and school or district-wide approaches. The overall planning strategy relies heavily on the work of the identified task force which can remain an integral component of the dropout prevention and recovery program through oversight, evaluation and recommendations for program improvement.

As vocational educators become aware of the need to supplement or enhance efforts to prevent or recover dropouts, we need to move decisively, but carefully, to assess the situation at hand and to select the best strategies we can to alleviate the problem. If we (1) adopt a structured and informed planning approach, (2) incorporate the key elements of successful programs into our program design, and (3) select a strategy that is comprehensive and tailored to the needs of the students in **our** schools, then we will be in a good position to achieve desired results. Several of the key elements of successful dropout prevention programs require the involvement and collaboration of other people and services located within the school environment or within the community. Vocational educators need to be able to identify these valuable resources and involve them in our efforts to help students succeed in school.

OTHER EDUCATION RESOURCES: COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

The education community as a whole has a vested interest in the problem of dropouts. This is one issue where so much is at stake that a tendency to remain "specialized" must be overcome in the interest of the at-risk student. No single component of the K through 12 delivery system possesses the resources to effectively meet all the needs of dropouts and potential dropouts, so it is vital that we all work together. Vocational educators at the secondary level need to develop the means to communicate and collaborate with the people and programs which can help students to stay in school. This includes education resources at the national, state and local levels whose services can lend support to our efforts to implement programs for dropout prevention and recovery.

There are a number of agencies and groups at the national level which have researched and reported on the dropout problem. A review of the literature currently available is time-consuming, but informative, and helps to give a broad perspective to the issue. Two national-level agencies which can provide resource material to assist local vocational educators in the planning and implementation of programs are the Center on Education and Training for Employment (formerly the National Center for Research in Vocational Education) at The Ohio State University and the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University. The Center at Ohio State has produced a series of dropout prevention materials including resource guides, student workbooks, video cassettes, and a collection of program summaries submitted by local practitioners titled A Compendium of What Works for Vocational Educators in Dropout Prevention. All of the materials are available for purchase and questions regarding these and other pertinent resources may be directed to the Center's Program Information Office through the central toll-free line (800) 848-4815. The National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University can also serve as a resource for local education agencies seeking descriptions of dropout prevention and recovery programs to replicate or use as a basis for programming. The Center is compiling a nationwide database of "Program Profiles" which can be requested through the South Carolina Network at (800) 868-3475.

The South Carolina Department of Education can serve as a state-level resource in a number of ways. Many programs and services administered by this agency target the needs of at-risk youth, and a sample of those offices which can provide assistance in dropout prevention and recovery efforts is included for consideration. The Office of Vocational Education provides leadership, technical assistance and curriculum materials to assist local school districts in the implementation of a wide variety of occupational and special programs available through the secondary vocational education delivery system. Through the Special Programs Unit, the Office of Vocational Education specifically directs Federal dollars and staff resources toward dropout prevention and recovery programs for at-risk youth. For further information, contact the Consultant for Special Programs at 734-8433.

The At-Risk Youth Program Coordination Section of the Office of Leadership and School Improvement was organized to coordinate all of the programs administered by the State Department of Education which have an impact on at-risk youth. The activities of this Section enable the State Department of Education to provide strong leadership and direct assistance to local school districts in the development and implementation of dropout prevention and recovery programs. Specific activities include: the distribution and management of Federal funds to decrease the use of alcohol and illicit drugs in schools; the implementation of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act to determine the needs of children of the homeless; the identification and dissemination of model programs for dropout prevention and recovery; the coordination and provision of awareness sessions, seminars, training, and on-site technical assistance regarding various aspects of the dropout problem for

school districts, other agencies, and community/parent groups; and the collection and dissemination of research and materials related to dropouts. For further information, contact the At-Risk Youth Program Coordination Section at 734-8458.

The Office of Instructional Technology manages the development, acquisition, scheduling and use of television and radio resources broadcast over the South Carolina Educational Television and Radio Networks. During the 1988-89 school year, 214 instructional series (3,758 individual lessons) will be available for use in grades K through 12. These televised series and lessons can be integrated into regular instructional programs or recorded for use in supplemental activities for identified students. Many of these series are designed for high school youth and several deal with relevant "at-risk" issues such as motivation, self-concept, coping skills, drug abuse, teen pregnancy and single parenting. The guide Instructional TV & Radio Resources 1988-89 describes each series and provides viewing and ordering information. Series such as "Issues of the 80's" also can be used for local staff development programs. For further information, contact the Chief Supervisor, Resource Development, at 734-8092.

The Office of Adult Education provides leadership and technical assistance to local school districts in planning, organizing, and evaluating programs for adults who did not complete a high school education. These programs help to provide a second chance for actual dropouts aged 18 and over by providing an opportunity for these individuals to complete the requirements for a high school diploma or prepare for the GED. Adult Education programs can also offer a "safety net" for actual and potential dropouts by providing opportunities for students under age 18 to make-up or earn high school credit through this alternative environment. In order for youth under the age of 18 to participate in Adult Education, local school board approval based on the special educational needs of the individuals must be obtained. For further information, contact the Director of the Office of Adult Education at 734-8070.

The Business/Education Partnership staff of the Division of Public Accountability coordinates activities designed to increase the participation of business in the public schools. As mandated by the Education Improvement Act, the State Board of Education adopted policies and accompanying procedures in August 1984 to create more effective partnerships between schools and businesses. The participating businesses support all student populations and twenty-five school districts with programs directed to at-risk youth have been identified. Based on the interest expressed by business partners in targeting this specific population, there are opportunities for additional partnerships. A broad range of services provided by business partners includes corporate volunteers, mentors, service on task forces and advisory committees, advisors for curriculum development, facilities and services, awards and incentives, corporate trainers and special project initiatives. For further information, contact the Incentives and Partnership Unit at 734-8785.

These are only a few examples of how the South Carolina Department of Education can assist local school districts in the prevention and recovery of dropouts. Many state-administered programs also have local contacts who can provide information on applicable programs and activities. Vocational educators need to reach out to other district personnel to broaden the range of services which can be offered to at-risk youth. Cooperative and supportive working relationships among school personnel increase the opportunities for potential dropouts to get the various kinds of assistance they need.

In order to achieve real collaboration within a school, it is essential that each component of the staff be involved in and support the plan or program selected. In Staying In...A Dropout Prevention Handbook, K-12, produced by the Vocational Studies Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the barriers to and benefits of achieving staff support are discussed. The barriers include (1) the insecurity created by innovation and new role

demands, (2) the increase in work load associated with program implementation, (3) a lack of sustained leadership at the top-levels, (4) the resistance of a small group of generally disgruntled personnel, and (5) a reluctance to participate in new ventures due to dissent associated with previous local efforts. As strategies for dropout prevention and recovery are considered, we must be prepared to face these obstacles and counteract negative attitudes by providing positive experiences for staff development and acceptance.

Vocational educators, like others in the school community--including administrators, academic teachers, resource staff, special education personnel and guidance counselors--may have an incomplete picture of what roles other educators assume in the day-to-day workings of the school or district. The ability to efficiently tap local resources depends on how well each segment understands the others and how effectively they communicate. Particularly where at-risk students are concerned, various types of expertise will benefit program efforts to address the often complex needs of these youth.

School and district-level administrators can offer insight regarding the range of programs available within a school and provide the top-level support required to implement alternative programs or structural changes in the educational setting which better address the needs of identified students. Administrators can also serve as program facilitators by supporting and participating in inservice programs to get staff involved, coordinating the linkages required for effective collaboration, and helping to establish and define the roles each staff member will take as part of the overall effort. Academic teachers, like vocational teachers, can provide valuable assistance in the identification and referral of potential dropouts based on the ability to detect learning difficulties and other personal or behavioral problems. When a commitment is made to focus on the individual needs of each student, academic teachers can use the daily scheduled contact to provide both the encouragement and instructional expertise necessary to enable at-risk youth to improve their basic skills and academic performance. When academic and vocational instruction is jointly planned and mutually reinforced, there is a greater likelihood that the learning process will become more integrated and relevant for students.

Remediation activities will be a major component of most dropout prevention and recovery programs, and teaching specialists and resource room staff can provide assistance to staff and students alike in these efforts. These services are individualized by design and use a variety of teaching methods and instructional materials to enable students to overcome skill deficiencies and experience success. A resource room or laboratory can also be used to provide supplemental activities such as assessment, life-skills training and exercises designed to improve students' self-concept and motivation for learning. For individuals who are handicapped, the special education personnel can provide direct services within a resource setting or in cooperation with the regular classroom teachers. Vocational and special education staff need to collaborate on assessment strategies and IEP development for handicapped individuals to ensure that appropriate vocational training is considered as an option to help these students complete their secondary education. Special educators can also provide needed expertise in the areas of curriculum development and modification; instructional techniques, materials, and equipment; and inservice training on dealing with student difficulties in classroom learning. The experience gained from working with handicapped individuals also has many applications for the various needs of other at-risk youth.

One of the primary needs of students who are unable to cope with the academic and social environment of school is counseling. Students who feel the need to quit school, for whatever reasons, need someone to talk to and to advocate for them. A guidance counselor can provide this assistance by helping students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and by serving as a liaison within the school setting. Weber (1987) emphasizes the importance of appropriate guidance and counseling services prior to high school, at the transition point into

high school, and during high school, and adds that a "heightened role to vocational education as a program alternative" should be assigned to these services as they are offered to dropouts and potential dropouts. The guidance counselor can act as the central figure in a formal identification and referral process and provide other essential services such as assessment, individual and group counseling, career development activities, parent consultations, and additional referrals to outside agencies, when necessary. While the time constraints on present guidance staff often inhibit the ability to offer the comprehensive range of counseling services required for dropout-prone youth, the provision of these services is critical to the success of dropout prevention and recovery programs.

It is clear that there are many resources within the education community that can contribute to the development and implementation of programs designed to prevent and recover dropouts. As vocational educators, we must define our role in this process in collaboration with other educators at the national, state and local levels. When instruction and support services are well integrated within a school system, students have a much better chance of getting the attention and assistance they require. When the needs of at-risk youth cannot fully be addressed by the schools, then educators can present a united front as they look outward to the surrounding community for necessary support.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES: LINKAGE AND PARTICIPATION

> Clearly, the problems faced by young people today impede the schools' ability to deliver effective educational service. The victim of child abuse or the resident of a neglected tenement will find concentration on secondary school subjects extremely difficult. Pregnancy, substance abuse and neighborhood violence are but three examples of the serious issues with which students are struggling. The impediments to learning must be identified, responded to, and treated... The schools cannot do it all. A partnership between community and school promises some remedy. (Herbert, 1986)

Students do not live in a vacuum, nor do they magically dispose of emotional and environmental influences when they walk into a school building. As the complexities of "the impediments to learning" are identified through our school intervention efforts, it may become apparent that additional resources will be needed to deal with some of the problems encountered by students. Many sectors of the community have a stake in preventing dropouts and schools need to find ways to interact with the people, organizations and businesses which can share both the responsibility and the resources required to enable at-risk youth to complete a secondary education. Four examples of community support which can be tapped through effective linkages are (1) parents, (2) government agencies, (3) community-based organizations, and (4) business and industry.

Parents are teachers in the home, and they exert a powerful influence over the success or failure of students in school. Parents who are involved in and are supportive of schools' efforts to prevent and recover dropouts can help to ensure success by reinforcing positive performance, behaviors and attitudes. Establishing a relationship between schools and parents can be difficult due to a number of reasons such as failure to establish the school/parent bond early in a child's educational process, the misunderstanding and blame that is attributed by one to the other for students' difficulties, the social and economic problems which may burden the parents, and educational, cultural or language barriers which alienate the parents from the schools. Even though certain parents may appear to be more of a hindrance than a help and, in some cases, parental involvement can be counter-productive, the literature on dropout prevention and recovery programs points to a crucial need to find ways to involve parents in these efforts where possible.

The resource manuals Staying In...A Dropout Prevention Handbook, K-12 and Working Together to Support At-Risk Youth highlight numerous ways parents can be involved in dropout prevention efforts as both **resources** and **learners.** Drawing from these documents, strategies which secondary schools can use to bring parents into the process include:

1. Parents as Resources:

   A. Parents can provide valuable information about their child (e.g., health, friends, family relations, responsibilities, etc.) which helps to clarify and give perspective to students' problems in school. One strategy is the **parent interview** which could take the form of a parent-teacher conference or a home visit. The parent interview process is most productive when both parents or significant adults (if applicable) are present and there is a sharing of information which also helps the parents become better acquainted with the school. Home visits offer the advantages of showing parents evidence of special effort on behalf of their child, giving school personnel greater empathy and understanding

of the student in relation to his or her home environment, and working with parents in a setting which is non-threatening to them. Flexibility in scheduling and consideration of parents' concerns will help to promote a positive interaction.

B. Parents will often be required to **provide consent** for their child to participate in dropout prevention or alternative programs. Two ways to accomplish this are through written contact and telephone contact. A telephone call can supplement a written consent form by providing parents with introductory information about a specific program. Written consent forms should contain sufficient information to ensure that parents understand the program objectives and activities and agree to any essential participation on their part (e.g., meeting with the program coordinator or monitoring homework assignments, etc.).

C. Parents can act as **volunteers** in dropout prevention programs by serving in a number of ways including:

- helping to contact other parents
- assisting in a program evaluation
- working one-on-one with underachievers
- sharing information about other countries or cultures
- staffing an informal drop-in center
- helping with an open house.

Parent volunteer programs work best when: (1) they have top-level administrative support; (2) they link parents' interests and abilities with the school's needs; and (3) the parents receive a complete orientation which ensures both the school's and the parent volunteer's responsibilities and expectations will be met.

2. Parents as Learners

A. Parents can be involved in the learning process through **activities targeted to them** or through their **participation in the activities designed for their children.** Parents can attend workshops, seminars, or movies on parenting which are designed to increase their awareness of the role they can play in their child's education. For example, they can be invited to informational meetings which make them aware of vocational options and enable them to help their children select school programs. By visiting their child's classroom or participating in a field trip, parents can also become better acquainted with the school program and see evidence of their child's behavior and performance.

B. One effective means of helping parents learn is to enable them to participate in **parent study groups** which offer a means of providing parents support and information designed to help them deal with their children and become more involved in their children's education. These study groups can cover a variety of topics such as parent-child relationships, improving communication and listening skills, resolving

conflicts, the use of encouragement to modify behavior, and helping children to study. These groups must be flexible in design and scheduled at convenient times for parents. They should be directed by a facilitator who can encourage the involvement and participation of all members to ensure that the subjects are meaningful and beneficial to the collective needs of the group.

When parents assume equal responsibility with the school for their children's learning, they become partners in the education process. This partnership is a valuable resource for dropout prevention and recovery.

There will be times when the problems faced by youth will require support beyond the school and the home. A variety of government agencies can lend support through publicly funded service programs. These include "mental and physical health services, juvenile delinquency prevention, vocational training, economic and social welfare services, maternity and infant care, rehabilitation, parks and recreation programs, and employment services" (Fennimore and Pritz, 1988). The development of a directory of services available in South Carolina and within a particular community is an excellent way to establish an expedient means of referral as individual student needs are identified. It is also helpful to establish personal contacts within a variety of agencies to foster communication and a mutual sharing of ideas and program initiatives.

A number of government agencies offer programs which are designed to educate youth regarding a variety of "risk" behaviors which can impede their progress in school. The "Teen Companion Program" sponsored by the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) seeks to reduce teen pregnancy among AFDC families by providing personal, vocational, and family development resources to participating families as well as specific information on health and sexual responsibility. To participate, eligible teens must have no children and must express a desire to be involved with the program. Eight program sites serving seventeen counties in South Carolina are managed by DSS through various county offices. The South Carolina Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse sponsors "ScIP", the School Intervention Program, which links a network of county alcohol and drug abuse programs with local school districts in an effort to prevent or reduce the inappropriate use of alcohol and other drugs. The program provides prevention, intervention, and treatment services for troubled students and their families. Specific activities are selected through a policy developed between local school systems and the county alcohol and drug abuse programs in an effort to meet the unique needs of the school and the community. Training is also provided for key personnel in the local school system. These are just two examples of how government agencies can provide support to at-risk students and their families.

Community-based organizations, many of which are private and non-profit, can offer a wide range of services which specifically target the needs of troubled youth. Neighborhood groups and organizations, community action agencies, fraternal organizations, local chambers of commerce, YMCA/YWCA's, religious groups, and agencies which operate youth employment and training programs such as JTPA are examples of the types of agencies which are in tune with the needs of a specific community and can provide a network of comprehensive services and programs to help youth remain in school. Community-based organizations provide many types of services including provision of food, clothing, shelter or transportation; tutorial services; job training; career exploration; employability development; services for pregnant or parenting teenagers; recreational activities; counseling; and motivational support, among others. When schools reach out to develop linkages with the resources of community-based organizations, they open the boundaries of the school to many allies in the fight to help young people succeed.

Given the economic impact the dropout problem creates for the job demands of the near future, it is not surprising that business and industry have become extremely interested in improving the holding power of high schools. Because they are genuinely concerned, members of the private sector are willing to invest money, time, and other resources into schools which are seeking strategies to help actual and potential dropouts earn minimum employment credentials. Two examples of school-business partnerships which reflect the diverse ways that business and industry can contribute to schools have been highlighted by Fennimore and Pritz (1988):

- Project COFFEE, an alternative high school meeting the needs of potential dropouts in North Oxford, Massachusetts, (which) was developed by a regional cooperative federation of seven school districts and a highly successful partnership with Digital Equipment. Digital Equipment's Educational Services provided curriculum materials, staff training, consultation, and job training experiences for students; and

- The Youth Motivation Program of Pinellas County is a business partnership where business people invest themselves in the future of youth. At-risk students are identified and matched with "youth motivators" who help these students develop life goals, improve employability skills, provide tutoring, serve as positive role models, and listen actively to and support students. Youth motivators attend training sessions to help them carry out their volunteer work.

The ten or more benefits mentioned in these two examples are but a few that successful school-business partnerships can offer to at-risk youth.

Business and industry professionals have long been valuable resources to vocational educators through their participation on local vocational program advisory councils. This support function could be expanded into the classroom where representatives of various types of jobs can provide the benefit of their experience to help potential dropouts see the relevancy of their school courses and help them to identify career goals. Effective partnerships between business, industry, and schools require careful planning, sensitivity to organizational protocol, mutual respect, and continual evaluation. The benefits to be accrued from successful efforts are far-reaching, as evidenced by the following assessment of the Business Education Exchange Program which links 28 businesses and 22 schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. According to the author, the program:

- develops communication among business personnel, students, teachers, principals, and administrators;

- creates awareness of the world of work and economic reality;

- fosters knowledge of the personal, social and vocational skills needed to enter the workforce;

- clarifies the effect academic choices, career exploration, and personal habit patterns have on future options;

- relates curriculum to actual job opportunities and applies basic economic principles to classroom coursework; and

- shares the responsibility for educational policy with business, government, community, and family. (Linton, 1985)

Each of these benefits of the school-business partnership contributes to the additional reinforcement and motivation many at-risk students need to stay in school.

Identification of community resources is a first step in soliciting support for dropout prevention and recovery programs. School personnel such as guidance counselors, job placement coordinators, school psychologists, administrators and public relations personnel can provide suggestions based on their contacts with different people and organizations. Another means of identifying community interest and support for program efforts is to develop and distribute a newsletter to inform parents, business and industry, and other community groups about the need for programs for at-risk youth, or if a program is in place, to publicize the goals, accomplishments or special events associated with the school's efforts. If an advisory committee which includes members of various segments of the community has been established to guide the school's dropout prevention and recovery program, these individuals can help to seek the involvement of the agencies or businesses they represent. As various types of community resources are identified, these can be included in a directory of services for use by program personnel and other members of the school staff. A three-ring binder approach allows for expansion and updating as new information is received. Examples of ways to collect and organize community resource data are included in Appendix C. The efforts required to involve the community in our schools will be more than rewarded by the ability to provide new and expanded programs to the students we serve.

THE SOUTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION DROPOUT PREVENTION PILOT PROGRAM: STRATEGIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Office of Vocational Education provided funding to three school districts in 1987-88 in support of a pilot effort to field test dropout prevention strategies at the local level. These programs were targeted to at-risk students who exhibited one or more of the following characteristics:

- Low academic achievement and/or poor basic skills
- Poor record of attendance
- Social and/or behavioral problems
- Returning to school after previously dropping out.

Each school district selected a program design which best met the needs of the district and the identified students. The goal of this effort was to examine the effects of diverse approaches targeted to keeping at-risk youth in school. At the conclusion of the pilot program, the participating school districts provided summary reports highlighting the strategies, strengths and weaknesses of each project and included recommendations for other school districts to review as strategies for dropout prevention are contemplated.

Cherokee County School District implemented "RAP: Reducing Adolescent Problems" which focused on motivational activities for 7th grade students and staff development activities for teachers and counselors. A dropout prevention task force was also appointed to make recommendations to reduce the district's dropout rate. Fairfield County Vocational Center provided career and basic skills enhancement for disadvantaged vocational students, career education activities for lower grade levels, and a linkage with the district's alternative school to give students hands-on prevocational experiences in the regular vocational classes. A social worker was employed to make parent and student contacts after school. Florence School District Three implemented "Operation Pride", an alternative program which allowed potential dropouts to earn regular high school credits through vocational education and physical education classes in the morning and earn adult education credit through an individualized academic curriculum in the afternoon. Motivational and support services were also provided. The outcomes of the three pilot projects, as described in the individual summary reports, provide insight from the local perspective on the implementation of programs for at-risk youth.

CHEROKEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

<u>Project Summary:</u> Project "RAP: Reducing Adolescent Problems" targeted sixty 7th grade students from three schools who were identified as "at-risk" by input from teachers, counselors, principals and assistant principals. The identification criteria included poor attendance records, low academic achievement, or social/behavioral problems. The primary objectives of the program were to motivate these students to stay in school and to improve their classroom performance. Teachers and counselors were also trained in effective strategies for dealing with at-risk youth.

Implementation strategies included working to improve students' self-concepts, attitudinal awareness, study skills, time management, career development, and the identification of needs, interests and abilities. Parental involvement was achieved through

home visits and workshops provided at the schools. A dropout prevention task force comprised of parents, teachers, administrators and community leaders was appointed to make recommendations for reducing the dropout rate. Dropout prevention school coordinators were designated to develop attendance, achievement and discipline contracts with participating students. Students who showed improvement in these areas received incentives and rewards.

Eighty-three percent of the target population successfully completed the 1987-88 school year. Due to a delayed start-up, a number of students were on the borderline at the beginning of the project because of poor attendance and lack of intervention. Follow-up interviews of students who were successful indicated that the special attention received from teachers and the dropout prevention school coordinators did provide motivation for many of these youth. The motivational strategy included the provision of special field trips to give students experiences designed to encourage future education and job possibilities. Ninety-five percent of the students participated in a field trip to the University of South Carolina at Spartanburg which focused on college-bound careers. Ninety-two percent of the students visited Spartanburg Technical College to explore occupational skills. Fifty-eight percent of the targeted group achieved their "contract" goals and were rewarded for their efforts.

Project Strengths: The strengths of this project were identified as (1) the use of "Quest (Skills for Adolescence)" in small group sessions conducted by each school's dropout prevention coordinator that allowed students to explore and share their feelings and concerns on a number of topics designed to improve self-concept, (2) the use of student contracts and rewards to provide incentive and motivation, (3) the use of field trips which provided students with experiences related to employment qualifications and educational opportunities, and (4) the development of the "Dropout Prevention Task Force" consisting of educators, community leaders, students and parents.

Project Weaknesses: The weaknesses of the project were identified as (1) the lack of organizational and developmental time which resulted in a delayed start-up and the failure of the pilot to assist several students who had serious grade and attendance problems by mid-year, (2) the lack of a cohesive district-wide dropout prevention policy, and (3) the difficulties encountered in scheduling the group "RAP" sessions.

Recommendations: The specific recommendations included in the Cherokee County School District final report are:

1. First of all, any school district that is interested in implementing a dropout prevention program should begin by reviewing district policies that impact on student dropouts.

2. A dropout prevention task force should be implemented including teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community leaders.

3. A school district should utilize the task force recommendations to implement and guide dropout prevention efforts.

4. A school district should provide school dropout prevention coordinators with training in a meaningful prevention curriculum such as QUEST (Skills for Adolescence).

5. A school district should involve all teachers and administrators in the identification of "at-risk" students at all levels. (Cherokee County School District No. 1, 1988)

Project Contact: For further information, please contact:

Director of Staff Development
Cherokee County School District No. 1
P.O. Box 460
Gaffney, South Carolina 29342
Phone: (803) 489-0261

FAIRFIELD COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Project Summary: Fairfield County Vocational Center included three areas in its dropout prevention program: (1) career and basic skills enhancement for 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students; (2) elementary and middle school career education; and (3) an alternative education program. The career and basic skills enhancement component identified potential dropouts at the vocational center who were learning disabled, disadvantaged, or scored in the lower quartile on standardized achievement tests. These students were placed in a pull-out program in conjunction with their vocational course and received remedial instruction in math, reading, and writing. These students were also provided advice on career choices and social skills through video presentations and mock interviews.

The career education component targeted 3rd, 6th, and 9th graders. The vocational guidance counselor visited classes and talked with students on career options, invited students to the Vocational Center for tours conducted by vocational students who explained the program offerings, and provided a follow-up visit to the elementary school classes to show these students video tapes of career clusters and the Vocational Center's recruitment film. After the middle school students toured the Vocational Center, five of the vocational teachers made follow-up visits and gave demonstrations in the areas of masonry, cosmetology, welding, marketing, and horticulture.

The 1987-88 school year marked the first year of operation for the Fairfield Alternative School which provided a unique instructional program for selected students entering the 8th grade. Based on the recommendations of teachers who identified students with low academic achievement, poor social skills, or attendance problems, a panel of administrators, guidance counselors and teachers screened and selected youth for the self-contained program which offered courses in English, math, science and social studies. As part of its dropout prevention program, the Fairfield County Vocational Center scheduled these students to rotate in groups of three through ten vocational courses offered as part of the regular vocational program. The students were mainstreamed into the ongoing classes to receive hands-on prevocational experiences. After rotating through all ten of the vocational courses, the students selected one vocational course to remain in for the final four weeks. The program included a plan to allow these youth to enroll in a vocational course of their choice in the 9th grade and to take the second level of the course in the 10th grade. In the 11th and 12th grades, these students are targeted to enroll in another vocational course. Students completing the program will have completed two vocational courses. An integral part of the program was the provision of a social worker to make home visits with the students and their parents which strengthened home-school relations and uncovered genuine concern on the part of most parents. The social worker also worked with the students' teachers to make them aware of the problems faced by these students.

Project staff reported that the hands-on prevocational experience left a lasting impression on students. Only one student did not like going to the Vocational Center. Several expressed interest in taking more than one vocational subject for credit. Few discipline problems occurred during the prevocational component and teachers observed that these students tended to act more mature in the presence of the older students. The

Alternative School students fit in well and performed assigned tasks in the vocational classrooms. The school district indicated that a true evaluation of this dropout prevention program was not possible after only nine months; however, the project did show evidence of future benefits and plans were made to continue certain components beyond the pilot period.

Project Strengths: The strengths of the project were identified as the elementary career education component and the alternative education component. Both of these aspects were new to Fairfield County and generated a high degree of enthusiasm.

Project Weaknesses: The school district identified the pullout program for career and basic skills enhancement as the main weakness of the project. Students did not like being removed from their regular vocational class two hours per week. The staff reported that if students were able to receive these services during a specific scheduled period, they would be more receptive to this component.

Recommendations: Several recommendations were offered relative to the alternative education component of this project, and how it might be strengthened for future implementation in the Fairfield County School District. Summarized and offered in a more general context, the recommendations are:

1. Provide sufficient funding for instructional equipment and materials to keep students active and curious.

2. Provide strong teachers who are prepared to deal with the discipline and related problems these students bring to class. Seven or eight students per teacher would be an ideal classroom size. Initiative, creativity, and knowledge of subject areas are essential teacher characteristics.

3. Provide the services of a psychologist who is trained to deal with the problems of adolescents. Students with real emotional problems need the constructive and supportive assistance of experts in the field.

4. Provide the services of a social worker to make home visits and develop a profile on each student. Provide opportunities for students and their parents to participate in counseling.

5. Educate and involve the community in program efforts. Identify services and activities which are and can be provided with community support. Clarify the intent and purposes of the program to prevent negative perceptions and inappropriate judgements. Labels can be particularly harmful to these students.

6. Provide opportunities for a structured physical fitness program. Alternative education programs may overlook this important component.

Project Contact: For further information, please contact:

Director
Fairfield County Vocational Center
Route 2, Box 5-T
Winnsboro, South Carolina 29180
Phone: (803) 635-5506

FLORENCE SCHOOL DISTRICT THREE

Project Summary: "Operation Pride", Florence School District Three's Alternative High School, is a joint effort between the Adult Education Program and Lake City High School. This program served as an Office of Vocational Education pilot dropout prevention site during the initial year of operation, 1987-88. The pilot project targeted sixteen average or slightly lower-than-average students who were not succeeding in a traditional classroom environment. Students were recommended by middle school principals and screened according to age (15-17 years), IQ (not special education qualified), number of retentions (two or more), discipline record (non-violent), and reading level (not below fifth grade). Students were selected based on the approval of the principal and/or program director and a parent or guardian/student contract. During participation in "Operation Pride", students attended regular high school vocational, physical education, and homeroom classes in the morning and attended an adult learning lab for their academic subjects in the afternoon. A supportive environment designed to enable these youth to earn high school credit for a diploma or prepare for a GED was provided in an effort to "(1) keep students in school, (2) foster academic and social comfort and security, (3) help the student identify with the school environment, (4) encourage a willingness to explore his/her potential, and (5) build confidence and a positive (self) concept."

Participants in the program received assessment, remediation, and individualized instruction in the learning lab environment. Additional strategies included: employability skills development through in-class behavior expectations and guest speakers from the community; weekly contract agreements for work to be accomplished with incentive rewards for satisfactory completion; and a considerable amount of individualized care, attention, and positive feedback designed to promote feelings of success and achievement. The academic outcomes were not as significant as projected due to intense emotional problems which affected students' academic learning and performance. Most of the students did respond well to the individualized, self-paced instructional approach and the hands-on vocational classes. The purchase and use of an individualized computer-based remedial program toward the end of the pilot period indicated that individual academic gains may be increased in future program years.

The most significant social outcome for these students was a reduction in behavior problems in class and out. Students learned to trust the project staff and responded positively to high expectations and an acceptance of individuality. One important learning outcome was the students' ability to accept the concept of appropriate/inappropriate behavior as opposed to the good/bad or right/wrong explanations they had previously encountered by school officials. This concept enabled them to better adapt to the behavior expected of them while at school. Students also learned that things went best for them when they cooperated, and they focused on working as a team.

Project Strengths: The primary strength of the project was identified as flexibility. In both program approach and instructional strategies, the staff was able to experiment and implement a variety of ideas and techniques. Utilization of materials matched to individual capability and interest contributed to the academic success of several students. Other project strengths included (1) the emphasis on treating students as young adults and referring to them as future employees, (2) the high expectations and positive feedback communicated to students which enabled them to experience success, (3) the hands-on training received through the vocational component and the use of local speakers which connected the educational process with the world of work, and (4) the use of contracts and rewards/privileges to encourage the completion of weekly instructional goals.

Project Weaknesses: The most critical weakness of the project was identified as the inability to deal effectively with the multitude of serious personal and family problems which

these students faced. The staff allowed students to share their problems and offered personal and on-going attention and assistance where possible, but it was evident that the nature and extent of the difficulties encountered called for trained one-on-one counseling for both students and their families. Examples of the situations identified for this group of students included "parental drug and alcohol abuse, a friend is raped, a sister is beaten by her husband, home burns (all is lost), living in a 'drug environment', feared pregnancy, poverty/lack of money, and life-threatening illness of parent." The staff reported that students' needs and potential for success depend far more on the effective resolution of emotional and social issues than they do on achievement test scores. Other minor weaknesses of the pilot project were identified as: (1) students were not allowed to participate in school-sponsored athletic events due to the nature of the units earned through the adult curriculum; (2) planned visits to local businesses were not accomplished, initially due to a lack of student "social graces" followed by scheduling and administrative difficulties encountered late in the year; and (3) the failure to indoctrinate the entire high school staff as to the purpose and principles of the program, which caused some undue stress and concern on the part of the students when they entered other classrooms.

Recommendations: The recommendations which were developed from the initial year of the "Operation Pride" alternative program are:

1. Learn from your weaknesses and build on your strengths. For example, a strong counseling component has been added for the 1988-89 program which includes a highly trained counselor who will address emotional needs, help with motivational activities, and establish a parent-support group and an advisory council for the program.

2. Staff must work hard to "hook" students and do whatever it takes to make students come to school, like it, and accept it. Identify each student's strengths or talents and emphasize these. Be flexible and remember that traditional approaches to teaching have not worked for these students.

3. Obtain the support of all the faculty who come in contact with identified students. Be sure to clarify the purpose and objectives of the program. Dispel misconceptions that the program is "special education" or for "juvenile delinquents".

4. Where possible, begin programs for dropout prevention at the elementary school level before problems and feelings become too deep-rooted and complex to deal with effectively.

5. Do not expect a "quick fix". Understand that students will be skeptical of you and your interest in them. Realize the magnitude and scope of the social and emotional problems these students bring with them to school. Help students believe that you are sincere and genuine in your interest for them. Be prepared for the unexpected.

Project Contact: For further information, please contact:

Director
Adult/Community Education
Lake City High School
P. O. Box 386
Lake City, South Carolina 29560
Phone: (803) 394-5517

The lessons learned from the experiences of the three South Carolina Office of Vocational Education dropout prevention pilot projects reflect many of the findings of research at the national level. When considered in combination, recommendations developed from national and local program efforts provide an outline by which vocational educators can begin to develop dropout prevention and recovery strategies tailored to fit a particular school or group of students. Perhaps the most significant finding of the pilot program is that while there was considerable variation among program activities, the common elements of **sensitivity** to the academic and personal needs of students; **flexibility** of instructional approach and support services; and **school and community involvement** to ensure the utilization of all available resources were proven strengths of each program design.

ALTERNATIVE SCHEDULING: MAKING RECOVERY MORE ACCESSIBLE TO HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

The key elements and linkages which contribute to the success of dropout prevention strategies are also found in programs which attempt to retrieve those individuals who do leave high school early. However, once students actually drop out and become separated from the public school system they become even more at risk. While some will find the motivation later down the road to take advantage of programs such as Adult Education, short-term adult vocational education, JTPA, or other employment and training programs, many will simply fall through the cracks and be forgotten. Local school districts which choose to extend a second chance to youth unable to succeed in a traditional school environment may wish to consider alternative school schedules as one strategy to encourage dropouts to return to the high school setting.

In Halfway Home & A Long Way To Go, the report of the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South, the following was offered as one recommendation to provide a nationally competitive education for all southern students:

> Compulsory school attendance laws need enforcing to keep students off the streets and at their desks. Because these laws only apply to students up to age 16, teenagers do drop out. For them, as well as for marginal and working students, high school programs and schedules should become more flexible. Teenagers could still finish school if allowed to arrange courses flexibly, with provision for work hours, evening classes, or reduced course load. Too many high school dropouts learn too late to see the handwriting on the wall--if they could only read it--and these join the ranks of other adult functional illiterates. Even if their diplomas take five or six years to earn, education still opens doors to employment which would otherwise be locked. (Southern Growth Policies Board, 1988)

Redefining school structures cannot be accomplished by vocational educators alone, but consideration of the advantages adjustments to scheduling offer to high school dropouts is one means by which the secondary vocational education system could assist in recovery efforts. Depending on the nature and extent of the structural changes, alternative programs within a school district's offerings may accomplish the desired results.

Fennimore and Pritz (1988) have identified several ways that schools can be more responsive to student needs as they become more flexible about time. For example, students may drop out of school because the school schedule does not fit their own. Students who work, marry or tend small children find it extremely difficult to meet the rigid daily schedule of a high school. In order for these youth to stay in school and also meet family or job responsibilities, the authors suggest scheduling options such as: ". . .extending school hours into the evening, using flextime for students and staff, creating more summer programs, and having an 'open-entry, open-exit' policy". Increased responsiveness to dropouts' lifestyles and learning needs would provide a more supportive environment and enable them to pursue secondary school programs at an individualized pace.

Fennimore and Pritz's research into alternative school schedules uncovered examples of how numerous school districts across the nation have implemented scheduling strategies which increase their holding power for at-risk youth. The following excerpts from A Guide for Dropout Prevention: Creating an Integrated Learning Environment in Secondary Schools indicate the range of possibilities to be considered:

- Buena Vista (Va.) City Public Schools offer students the opportunity to go to school year-round. Students attend for three quarters and then have the option to extend their studies in a fourth quarter. Fifty-nine percent of the students take advantage of the option (47 percent for enrichment, 43 percent for remediation, 9 percent for promotion, and 1 percent for acceleration).

- A program in Fullerton, California, called the Alternative and Continuing Education Program, offers opportunities for students to finish their high school education at their own pace and consistent with their life roles. For example, students with daytime jobs can complete their high school diploma through independent study contracts. "Opportunity Classes" are available for students who have missed a great number of days in the quarter but are ready, mid-quarter, to start anew. Class schedules at this high school run from early morning to late evening to accommodate special needs.

- The Center for Employment Training (San Jose, California) is an alternative high school that provides training in 17 different skill areas. All instruction is competency-based, which permits students to begin at their own level and advance at their own rate. Students can enter and exit as needed, since they always know where to start again. All occupational and academic programs are conducted on an open-entry/open-exit basis. (Fennimore and Pritz, 1988)

The benefits of providing flexible scheduling options such as the continuous high school, year-round schools, full-time schools, and extended class periods are summarized by the authors as "(1) better accommodation to student schedules, (2) more intensive treatment of topics and practice of skills, (3) opening up of entry into the school for both students and the community, (4) more time for individualized attention and personalized problem solving, and (5) a greater diversity of classroom activities."

Major changes in the scheduling and restructuring of high school programs is not an easy task and would require considerable planning and policy development at the state and school district levels. In South Carolina, an experimental program application may be necessary to implement alternative schedules or programs. However, if we are dedicated to the concept of providing high school dropouts a second chance within the public secondary school system, it is not likely that we will accomplish this task by offering them only "more of the same". As educators, it is important that we consider a variety of options as we search for solutions to this complex issue.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT: A NECESSARY INGREDIENT

A strong, caring and committed staff may be the most important ingredient in dropout prevention and recovery programs. Every aspect of program development for at-risk youth--planning, identification, referral, implementation, collaboration, and evaluation--will have a better chance for success if the staff whose support is essential to these efforts master the three "A's": (1) an **awareness** of the nature and scope of the dropout problem and the characteristics of potential dropouts; (2) **acceptance** of the fact that every educator has a role to play in preventing dropouts and that every student can succeed given the appropriate support and encouragement; and (3) the **ability** to identify and remove the barriers to learning and to promote self-esteem in those students who are most familiar with failure. Staff development activities which include vocational administrators, counselors and teachers can help to develop staff unity and build support for local programs.

The role of vocational administrators in staff development activities is a primary one because the attitude of the school administration sends a signal to the entire staff regarding the importance of any program initiative. If dropout prevention and recovery is established as a top priority by administrators, then other school personnel will respond in kind. If vocational administrators believe they are part of the solution to the dropout problem, they will express this in their words and actions and motivate staff members to do the same. Vocational administrators need to be involved in the development and coordination of inservice activities which address the awareness, acceptance and ability components of dropout prevention and recovery. Those who attend and participate in these sessions will go even farther in lending their support to the teachers, counselors and other school personnel who can make a positive difference in the lives of at-risk youth.

Awareness strategies which may be incorporated into a staff development program for dropout prevention and recovery might address the economic and social consequences dropping out can have on an individual, such as reduced opportunities for employment, decreased earnings over a lifetime, greater dependence on welfare and other social programs, and increased participation in criminal behavior. For a broader perspective, information which illustrates the impact of dropouts on society through higher costs for social programs, projected labor shortages, and the threatened productivity of the nation may help staff members to see that this is everybody's problem and it will not go away quietly. Specific data gathered from up-to-date local and national research on this issue will carry more weight than general references. When school personnel understand the ramifications that dropping out poses for the individuals and the communities in which they live, the rationale for getting involved will be established.

The other side of the awareness issue deals with the identification of potential dropouts. Teachers and counselors need to be able to recognize and react to the academic, emotional and other "risk" factors which are associated with students' decisions to drop out of school. A distinction between characteristics which are "school-related" versus "family-related" may help staff to realize the impact they do have in the school and become more conscious of how they relate to individual students. A broader understanding of how such factors as poverty, low self-esteem, and lack of a stable home environment influence academic performance and behavior in the classroom should sensitize staff to the personal needs of students. Those who work most directly with at-risk youth need to be able to detect the symptoms of underlying difficulties and take steps to provide the necessary intervention. Teachers and counselors cannot be expected to resolve every problem, but they should be given the responsibility and resources to make referrals to other service providers as needed.

A diverse group of school professionals will need to be involved in dropout prevention programs which include formal systems of identification and referral and a variety of implementation strategies. To ensure the participation and cooperation of each staff member, inservice activities that promote acceptance of the program and clarification of roles and responsibilities will be required. "The school community will most likely support a strategy that they have helped to develop, that they understand, and one that they feel has a reasonable chance for success" (Novak and Dougherty, 1981). Activities should be designed to solicit input, so that staff members can help define the problem, generate and select solutions, and provide feedback as the program progresses. A "model" program design that is replicated in a setting where it is not compatible with the values, needs and abilities of a particular school community may not be successful.

Acceptance of at-risk students as individuals who **can** succeed is a necessary component of staff development. Teachers, in particular, have considerable influence over students and this relationship can have a strong positive impact on dropout prevention. Activities designed to show teachers how **their** self-concepts, attitudes and expectations affect student performance and self-esteem should help teachers understand their role in the success or failure of students in the classroom. Staff members who are provided with opportunities to enhance their own feelings of self-worth and ability will be in a better position to create a positive learning environment for all students. Open, caring staff help to develop a bond between the students and the school which makes students **want** to be there.

Beyond developing an awareness of and a concern for the needs of potential dropouts, staff members need to learn techniques and strategies which have proven effective with at-risk youth. Inservice activities designed for teachers might focus on the relationship of teaching style to learning style, classroom management, motivational activities, counseling skills, or positive evaluation techniques. Counselors may need additional information about assessment strategies, developing coping skills in students, or career development activities that are targeted to at-risk youth. Staff members can also benefit from training designed to establish effective linkages with other school and community resources and parents. Inservice activities which build communication and human relations skills provide staff members with a strengthened ability to relate to students and to determine their needs.

As vocational educators prepare to implement strategies and programs for dropout prevention and recovery, staff development in this area must be a major consideration. Helping at-risk youth to complete school in spite of the barriers they face requires the combined efforts of a capable and caring staff. All members of the school community need to become part of the solution. Activities which promote our awareness, acceptance and ability to contribute to the effort will help to ensure that our involvement is successful.

CONCLUSION

"If we have standards we wish **every** student to attain, some will require more assistance than others. The ideal is to have all students meeting the higher standards" (Hodgkinson, 1985). The goals of the educational reform movement implemented in this decade are commendable and achievement of these goals will help to ensure a more literate and productive workforce. Hodgkinson has identified a direct link between state-level economic development and high school retention. Unless we are willing to sacrifice one-third of South Carolina's young people to failure, illiteracy, and probable unemployment, more attention must be given to students who are at risk within the present school system. **Educational reform must encompass both excellence and equity.**

The South Carolina secondary vocational education delivery system has been a part of the overall education improvement strategy and also has a role to play in dropout prevention and recovery. The solution to the dropout problem rests in many hands, but Vocational Education can have a strong positive effect on at-risk youth when effectively utilized. Weber (1987) concluded from his review of relevant research and programs: "When properly structured, programs that identify dropout-prone students, provide guidance and counseling services, and provide opportunities to explore and learn the occupational skills that define specific careers appear to be beneficial in reducing the dropout rate." As vocational educators, we must fully use the tools of our delivery system to meet the needs of at-risk youth. Beyond that, we must take action to identify successful strategies, foster new relationships, learn from experience, expand our alternatives, and develop our ability to identify and remove the barriers to learning.

Dropout prevention and recovery is not an easy task, but we will take a giant step in the right direction if we embrace the philosophy that school is for all students and each student must be provided with opportunities for success. **To accept this challenge is to renew our commitment to our stated mission.**

GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVING BEHAVIOR

1. The word "behavior" refers to actions. Describe specific, observable behaviors.

AVOID SAYING	SAY
He is a good student.	He completes assignments.
She is a nice person.	She says "please" and "thank you".
He is conscientious.	He is on time for class every day.

2. Do not interpret behavior or attach any subjective meaning to it.

AVOID SAYING	SAY
She is disruptive in class.	She walks around the room.
He is very shy.	He seldom speaks to classmates.
He is not motivated.	He takes longer than others to finish his work.

3. Observe a student over a period of days to ensure that the information you compile is accurate. Observing one student one time will not give you an accurate picture of that student's behavior.

4. Have more than one person observe the student's behavior. This increases the accuracy of behavior descriptions. These observations may be done at the same time or at different times.

5. When describing behaviors, also describe the activities surrounding the behavior. Whether behavior is appropriate or inappropriate depends on the situation.

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth. Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 19.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

Student_____ Grade_____

Please check any of the following characteristics that apply to this student.

_____Poor grades

_____Low math scores

_____Failed a class

_____Immature

_____Unable to identify with other students

_____Frequent health problems

_____A "loner"

_____Verbal deficiency

_____Non-English speaking home

_____Disruptive in class

_____Stressful home life

_____Minority

_____Nonparticipation in school activities

_____Frequent absenteeism

_____Low reading scores

_____Failed a grade

_____Easily distracted

_____Poor social adjustment

_____Fails to see relevance of education

_____Single parent family

_____Low self-concept

_____Does not relate to authority

_____Siblings/parents dropped out

_____Frequent tardiness

_____Physically/psychologically abused

_____Alcohol and/or drug abuse

_____Contact with police

_____Course selection

Other: _____

_____

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth, Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 14.

Teacher Survey for Student Identification Process

Teachers:

We would like your help in identifying students for the Experience Based Education Program for next year. Below are some aspects that a student might possess to qualify for E.B.E. Please list any student who is 14 years old or older, and who you feel is a potential dropout. Just a reminder - the potential dropout may or may not be the student in your class who is acting out or a behavior problem. Often times the reserved students may possess dropout tendencies. Please keep this in mind when making your recommendations. After each student that you list please indicate at least one reason for your identification of that student by commenting in the space on the attached sheet. This will greatly assist us in making a final selection. Thank you.

1.	Emotional	Exhibits emotional outbursts or withdrawal which makes it difficult to function in a rational manner.
2.	Attendance	Truancy, habitual absences or tardies, frequent period skips.
3.	Educational Achievement	Record of frequent failures throughout school. Functions below grade level.
4.	Attitude	Personal motivation lacking Habitual lack of cooperation in classroom setting Reacts negatively toward authority figure.
5.	Family Related	Parent or sibling influence to leave school. Broken home Parent with drug/alcohol problem. Other members of family dropped out.
6.	Behavior	Creating a destructive atmosphere Abuse of school, fellow students, staff.
7.	Peer Relations	One who follows peers regardless of consequences to self. The peers tend to be negative toward the school establishment. Those who have great difficulty relating to peers in a positive manner. (Loner?)
8.	Self Concept	Satisfaction with self as a person is usually poor.
9.	Self Prophecy	Has indicated a desire to leave school.

Original Source: Experience Based Education. Lincoln, NE: Lincoln Public Schools, 1974.

Secondary Source: Novak, Jan and Barbara Dougherty (eds.). Staying In...A Dropout Prevention Handbook, K-12. Madison, WI: Vocational Studies Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1981, Section 3, p. 51.

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name_____ Grade_____

Dear Student:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help us find out about the students in our school so that we can better serve them. Please answer the following questions and give us any additional information you think we need to know. If you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, feel free to leave them blank.

1. Do you live with both parents? YES____ NO____
2. If not, who do you live with?_____
3. How many brothers and sisters do you have?_____

   What do they do? (work, school, both?)_____
4. Did your father graduate from high school? YES____ NO____
5. Did your mother graduate from high school? YES____ NO____
6. In which subjects are you most successful?_____
7. In which subjects are you least successful?_____
8. What do you do after school?_____
9. Are you involved in any school activities?_____

   If not, why?_____
10. What do you do during summer vacation?_____

11. What jobs do you think you might enjoy?_____

_____

Why?_____

_____

12. How would you describe yourself?_____

_____

13. How would your friends describe you?_____

_____

14. How does your family describe you?_____

_____

15. Who do you talk to when you have a problem?_____

_____

16. If you could do anything you wanted to do, what would it be?_____

_____

17. What do you like about school?_____

_____

18. What do you dislike about school?_____

_____

19. Are you currently working outside of school?_____

If so, what hours do you work?_____

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et.al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth. Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 15-16.

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Parent(s):

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out as much as we can about our students so that we are better able to meet their needs. Please answer the following questions. If there are any questions you are uncomfortable with, feel free to leave them blank. Thank you for your help.

Parent Name(s)_____

Student Name_____

1. Father's occupation: _____

   Did you graduate from high school? YES____ NO____

2. Mother's occupation: _____

   Did you graduate from high school? YES____ NO____

3. How many children are in your family?_____

   What grades are they in school?_____

   Do any of them work?_____

   Have any of them dropped out of school? YES____ NO____

4. What would you like your son/daughter to do after he/she gets out of school? (technical school, community college, college, job)_____

   _____

5. What kind of job would you like your child to have?_____

   _____

6. How much time does your child spend studying?_____

7. What does your child do in his/her spare time?_____

   _____

   _____

8. What duties does he/she have around the house?_____

_____

9. Does your child have any health problems?_____

_____

10. Does your child work outside the home?_____

If so, what are his/her hours?_____

11. What does your child do especially well? (special talents, skills, etc.)_____

_____

_____

12. What are his/her weaknesses?_____

_____

13. Please tell us anything else you think we need to know about your child so that we can better serve him/her._____

_____

_____

14. Are there programs or services you would like to see offered by the school?_____

_____

_____

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth. Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 17-18.

IN-SCHOOL REFERRAL FORM

Student Name_____

Grade/Class_____

Teacher's Name_____

PROBLEM AREA	YES	NO
1. Difficulty with basic skills	___	___
2. Excessive absences and/or tardiness	___	___
3. Disruptive behavior in class	___	___
4. Failure to meet class requirements	___	___
5. Low self-esteem	___	___

Other_____

_____

Additional Comments_____

_____

_____

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth, Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 25.

Sample In-School Referral Form

MEMO

TO: All staff (e.g., teachers, counselors, aides, support staff)

FROM: Dropout Prevention Staff/Name of Contact Person

RE: Referral of Candidates for Dropout Prevention Programs/Interventions

DATE:

We would like to begin screening students who might be potential dropouts. We are looking for students who fit all or some of the following criteria:

- underachieving
- poor attendance
- significant difficulties in reading or math
- evidence of emotional problems (e.g., very low self-esteem, disruptive)

On the bottom, please list the students who you feel meet these criteria (any or all). Any additional criteria which you feel warrants special consideration, please note.

THANK YOU for your cooperation. Please return by _____.
date

****

Recommendations for 19___-19___ School Year

STUDENT	CRITERIA	GRADE
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Adapted from Alternative Learning Program. McFarland, WI: McFarland Community Schools, n.d.

Source: Novak, Jan and Barbara Dougherty (eds.). Staying In ... A Dropout Prevention Handbook, K-12. Madison, WI: Vocational Studies Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin - Madison. 1981, Section 3, p. 40.

MATCHING TEACHING STYLE TO LEARNING STYLE

	LEARNING STYLE	STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	TEACHING STRATEGY
I.	**PERCEPTUAL PREFERENCES**		
	Visual	must have visual stimuli and visual representation	slides, movies, films, TV, demonstration, field trips
	Written	dependence on reading and writing	reading and writing assignments, book based discussions
	Auditory	learns by hearing	lecture, tapes, sound film, discussion
	Motor Activity	learns by moving around	role play, games, learning centers
	Tactile	has to touch everything	demonstration, games, creative projects
II.	**STRUCTURE**		
	Much Structure	short attention span, constant movement, asks for directions often, lack of self-confidence, lack of organization	definite and consistent rules, step-by-step instructions, short deadlines, one objective at a time, continuous feedback, concrete materials
	Some Structure	prefers to work alone, grade conscious, does not ask questions or express personal opinions	definite and consistent rules, non-threatening situations, praise and support often
	Little Structure	likes to discuss and argue, will question and volunteer, not afraid of making mistakes, tends to see entire picture and not the steps to get there	provide options in seating, pace, and topics, mobility, abstract materials, sharing in decision making, collaborative learning procedures
III.	**ENVIRONMENT**		
	Field Independent	prefers to work independently task oriented, competitive, formal relationship with teacher	graphs and formulas, focus on details, then generalities, provide independent activities
	Field Dependent	prefers to work with and help others, seeks guidance and demonstration from teacher	emphasize generalities, use narration, drama, humor, provide cooperative work environment

(Adapted from: Bennett, 1986)

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth. Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 56.

PARENT SURVEY

Dear Parents:

The purpose of this letter is to help us identify ways in which parents may become more involved in their children's education. The list below contains activities in which parents have participated in the past. Please read through this list and place a check by those activities that are of interest to you. If you have additional suggestions, please list them in the space marked "other".

Participation as Resources

_____ 1. Participation in PTO/PTA/PTSA.

_____ 2. Participation in parent advisory groups.

_____ 3. Attendance at parent-teacher conferences.

_____ 4. Assistance in student program evaluation.

_____ 5. Assistance with newsletters.

Participation as Volunteers

_____ 1. Volunteer as a classroom aid, to assist teachers in working with students.

_____ 2. Volunteer as a tutor for students who need instructional support.

_____ 3. Volunteer as clerical help in school office.

_____ 4. Volunteer as classroom speaker to discuss my career or the organization I work for.

_____ 5. Volunteer to work with groups of students as a sponsor for a school club, or as a teacher's assistant on a field trip.

Participation as Learners

_____ 1. Attendance at a workshop or seminar to learn how to best deal with childrens' problem behaviors.

_____ 2. Attendance at a workshop or seminar to learn how to help my child study.

_____ 3. Attendance at a workshop to help me improve my coping skills and my problem-solving skills.

_____ 4. Attendance at a workshop or seminar to help me learn about and understand child development.

_____ 5. Attendance at a group discussion where I can meet other parents and learn how they cope with similar problems.

Other

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth. Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 147-148.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Name of Organization _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Contact Person(s) _____

1. Please describe your organization and its major products/services.

2. Do you have printed information describing your organization? YES___ NO___

   If so, can you send us samples? YES___ NO___

3. Is there someone from your organization who would be willing to speak to a class about careers?

   YES___ NO___

   If so, how can we arrange a meeting?

   _____

   _____

4. Would your organization be willing to provide tours for students? YES___ NO___

   If so, what do we need to know when we set up a field trip?

   _____

   _____

5. Do you hire students for part-time or summer jobs and/or volunteer work? YES___ NO___

   If so, briefly describe the job duties, hours, and wages if any.

   _____

   _____

6. Would someone from your organization be interested in serving on an advisory committee for the school?

   YES____ NO____

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth. Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 129.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE FACT SHEET

Name of Organization _____

Address _____

Contact person _____ Phone _____

Description of Resource (social service, business, etc.) _____

_____

GENERAL SERVICE	YES	NO
Field Trips	____	____
Guest Speakers	____	____
Volunteers	____	____
Materials	____	____
Equipment	____	____
Donated Services	____	____
Advisory Committee Members	____	____
Other		
_____		
_____		

WORK-RELATED SERVICES	YES	NO
Occupational Training	____	____
Job Shadowing	____	____
Job Opportunities	____	____
Other		
_____		
_____		

COUNSELING SERVICE	YES	NO
Family Counseling	____	____
Legal Advice	____	____
Health	____	____
Mental Health	____	____
Drug Abuse	____	____
Alcohol Abuse	____	____
Vocational Career Counseling	____	____
Employment Counseling	____	____
Educational Guidance	____	____
Other		
_____		
_____		

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth. Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 130.

EMERGENCY COMMUNITY RESOURCES

EMERGENCY	AGENCIES	
Child Care	Name:_____	Name:_____
	Address:_____	Address:_____
	Phone:_____	Phone:_____
	Contact:_____	Contact:_____
Clothing	Name:_____	Name:_____
	Address:_____	Address:_____
	Phone:_____	Phone:_____
	Contact:_____	Contact:_____
Financial	Name:_____	Name:_____
	Address:_____	Address:_____
	Phone:_____	Phone:_____
	Contact:_____	Contact:_____
Food	Name:_____	Name:_____
	Address:_____	Address:_____
	Phone:_____	Phone:_____
	Contact:_____	Contact:_____
Housing	Name:_____	Name:_____
	Address:_____	Address:_____
	Phone:_____	Phone:_____
	Contact:_____	Contact:_____

Legal	**Name:**_____	**Name:**_____
	Address:_____	**Address:**_____
	Phone:_____	**Phone:**_____
	Contact:_____	**Contact:**_____
Medical	**Name:**_____	**Name:**_____
	Address:_____	**Address:**_____
	Phone:_____	**Phone:**_____
	Contact:_____	**Contact:**_____
Protective Services	**Name:**_____	**Name:**_____
	Address:_____	**Address:**_____
	Phone:_____	**Phone:**_____
	Contact:_____	**Contact:**_____
Transportation	**Name:**_____	**Name:**_____
	Address:_____	**Address:**_____
	Phone:_____	**Phone:**_____
	Contact:_____	**Contact:**_____
Other	**Name:**_____	**Name:**_____
	Address:_____	**Address:**_____
	Phone:_____	**Phone:**_____
	Contact:_____	**Contact:**_____

Source: Cunningham, Donna, et. al. Working Together To Support At-Risk Youth. Austin: The Extension Instruction and Materials Center of the University of Texas at Austin, 1988, p. 131-132.

COMPANY RESOURCE SURVEY

COMPANY RESOURCE SURVEY

Activity	Current Involvement	Potential Involvement
Volunteer activities with students Classroom activities in curriculum areas (specify areas of interest) * Tutoring		
* Library, clinic, playground, athletics		
* Transportation		
* Career Education		
* Service on advisory groups		
Teaching mini-courses * Subject area		
* Target audience		
Field trips * Company sites		
* Others		
Special projects * Awards		
* Athletic teams		
* School publications		
* Art and music		
* Sponsorship of student groups		
Financial support * Scholarships		
* Mini-grants to teachers		
* Incentive grants		
* Equipment purchases		
* Internships for teachers		
Administrative support * Data processing		
* Landscaping		
* Management Consulting		

continued

Activity	Current Involvement	Potential Involvement
Information on current volunteer activities with schools:		
* Volunteer as individual		
* Service on school board		
* Participation in PTA		
* Other		
Work-Study opportunities (Indicate company department, number of positions available, types of skills required, and training possibilities.)		

The company resource survey has two purposes: To find out what employees are currently doing in the schools and to give you some indication of what they as individuals and as company administrators are willing to do.

Disseminated by
Barbara Dougherty & Jan Novak
Vocational Studies Center
University of Wisconsin-Madison
964 Educational Sciences Bldg.
1025 West Johnson Street
Madison, WI 53706

Source
COMPANY-SCHOOL COLLABORATION: A MANUAL FOR DEVELOPING SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS. Education Services-American Council of Life Insurance.
1850 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006 (pages 18 & 19)

C1

Community Resource Grid

Resources	Help Improve Public Image	Personal Counseling	Career Information	Occupational Training	Job Placement	Academic Classes	Materials or Transportation	Financial Assistance	Help Evaluate Program	Other
1. Job Service										
2. Private Industry Council, JTPA										
3. Vocational Rehabilitation										
4. Vocational Schools										
5. Social Service Agencies										
6. Community Action Programs										
7. Juvenile Justice System										
8. Local Labor Unions										
9. Local Service Groups										
10. Advisory Committees										
11. Colleges and Training Institutions										
12. Parents										
13. Religious Organizations										
14. Other										

Jan Novak & Barbara Dougherty
Vocational Studies Center
University of Wisconsin-Madison
964 Educational Sciences Bldg.
Madison, WI 53706

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